

# MATURE FAITH—ILLUSTRATED BY ABRAHAM'S OFFERING UP ISAAC NO. 868

A SERMON  
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 2, 1869,  
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE NEWINGTON.

*“And He said, Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and get you into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of.”*  
*Genesis 22:2.*

I DO not intend to enter into this narrative in its bearing upon our Lord, although we have here one of the most famous types of the Only-Begotten, whom the Great Father offered up for the sins of His people. Perhaps that may be the subject this evening. But as I have, in the recollection of some of you, already given you three sermons upon the life of Abraham, [See Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit—Volume 14—Nos. 843, 844, 845—“Effectual Calling—Illustrated by the Call of Abram.” “Justification by Faith—Illustrated by Abram’s Righteousness.” “Consecration to God—Illustrated by Abraham’s Circumcision.”] illustrating his effectual calling, his justification, and his consecration to the Lord, we will now complete the series by dwelling upon the triumph of Abraham’s faith when his spiritual life had come to the highest point of maturity.

Opening your Bibles at this chapter, you will please observe the time when God tried Abraham with the severest of his many ordeals. It was “after these things,” that is to say, after nine great trials, each of them most searching and remarkable. After he had passed through a great flight of affliction, and had through the process been strengthened and sanctified, he was called to endure a still sterner test. From which fact it is well to learn that God does not put heavy burdens upon weak shoulders, and He does not allot ordeals fit only for full-grown men to those who are but babes. He educates our faith, testing it by trials which increase little by little in proportion as our faith has increased. He only expects us to do man’s work, and to endure man’s afflictions when we have passed through the childhood state, and have arrived at the stature of men in Christ Jesus. Expect then, beloved, your trials to *multiply* as you proceed towards heaven; do not think that as you grow in divine grace the path will become smoother beneath your feet, and the heavens serener above your heads; on the contrary, reckon that as God gives you greater skill as a soldier, He will send you upon more arduous enterprises, and as He more fully fits your boat to brave the tempest and the storm, so will He send you out upon more boisterous seas, and upon longer voyages, that you may honor Him, and still further increase in holy confidence. You would have thought that Abraham had now come to the land Beulah, that in his old age, after the birth of Isaac, and especially after the expulsion of Ishmael, he would have had a time of perfect rest. Let this warn us that we are never to reckon upon rest from tribulation this side of the grave. No, the trumpet still sounds the note of war; you may not yet sit down and bind the wreath of victory about your brow; no garlands of laurel, and songs of victory for you as yet; you have still to wear the helmet, and bear the sword, and watch, and pray, and fight, expecting that, perhaps, your last battle will be the worst, and that the fiercest charge of the foe may be reserved for the end of the day.

Having thus observed the time when God was pleased to try the great pattern of believers, we shall now *look at the trial itself*; we shall *next see Abraham’s behavior under it*; and shall, in conclusion, spend a little time in *noting the reward which came to him* as the result of his endurance.

## I. And first, THE TRIAL ITSELF.

Every syllable of the text is significant. If George Herbert were speaking of it, he would say the words are all a case of knives cutting at Abraham’s soul. There is scarcely a single syllable of God’s address to him, in the opening of this trial, but seems intended to pierce the patriarch to the quick. Look. “Take now *your son*.” What? A father slay his *son*! Was there nothing in Abraham’s tent that God would have but his son? He would cheerfully have given Him sacrifices of bullocks and flocks of sheep; all the silver and the gold he possessed he would have lavished from the bag with eager cheerfulness. Will nothing content the Lord but Abraham’s son? If one must be offered of humankind, why not Eliezer of Damascus, the steward of his house; must it be his son? How this tugs at the father’s heart-

strings. His son, the offspring of his own loins, must be made a burnt offering! Will not God be content with any proof of his obedience but the surrender of the fruit of his body? The word *only* is made particularly emphatic by the fact that Ishmael had been exiled at the command of God; very much to Abraham's grief Hagar's child had been driven out; "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac" said Sarah, and God bade the patriarch regard the voice of his wife, so that now Isaac was his only son. If Isaac shall die, there is no other descendant left, and no probabilities of any other to succeed him. The light of Abraham will be quenched, and his name forgotten. Sarah is very old, as he himself is also—no infant's cry will again gladden the tent, and Isaac is his only son, a lone star of the night; the only son, the lamp of his father's old age. Nor is that all—"Your only son, *Isaac*." What a multitude of memories that word, "*Isaac*," awoke in Abraham's mind! This was the child of promise, of a promise graciously given, of a promise, the fulfillment of which was anxiously expected, but long, long, long delayed. Isaac, who had made his parents' hearts laugh—the child of the covenant, the child in whom the father's hopes all centered, for he had been assured, "In Isaac shall your seed be called." And after all that, must the gift of God be retracted? Must the covenant of God be nullified, and the channel of the promised blessings be dried up forever? Oh, trial of trials! "Your *son*." "Your *only* son." "Your only son, *Isaac*." And it was added, "*whom you love*." Must he be reminded of his love to his heir at the very time when he is to lose him? Oh, stern word that seems to have no heart of compassion in it! Was it not enough to take away the loved one without at the same instant awakening the affections which were so rudely to be shocked? Isaac was very rightly beloved of his father, for in addition to the ties of nature, and his being the gift of God's divine grace, Isaac's character was most lovely. His behavior on the occasion of his sacrifice proves that in his spirit there was an abundance of humility, obedience, resignation, and gentleness—indeed, of everything which can make up the beauty of holiness! And such a character was quite sure to have won the admiration of his father, Abraham, whose spiritual eyes were well qualified to discern the excellence which shone in his beloved son. Ah, why must Isaac die? And die, too, by his father's hand! Oh, trial of trials! Contemplative imagination and sympathetic emotion can better depict the father's grief than any words which it is in my power to use. I cast a veil where I cannot paint a picture.

But note, not only was this tender father to lose the best of sons, but he was to lose him in the direst way. He must be *sacrificed*—he must be sacrificed *by the father himself*! If the Lord had said, "Speak with Eliezer, and charge him to offer up your son," it would have softened the trial. But so far as Abraham could understand the command, it seemed to say, *you Abraham, you* must be the priest; your own hand must grasp the sacrificial knife, and you must stand there with breaking heart to drive the knife into the breast of your son, and see him consumed, even to ashes, upon the altar. All this appeared to him to be involved in God's word, although the Lord meant not so, but meant to accept the *will* for the *deed*. Everything was designed to make the trial severe; the friend of God was tried in such a way as probably never fell to the lot of man before or since. In addition to the sacrifice, Abraham was commanded to go to a mountain which God would show him. It is easy, on the spur of the moment, and under the influence of sacred impulse, to hastily perform an heroic deed of self-sacrifice, but it is not so easy for men of passions, such as ours, to deliberate over the sacrifices demanded of us. But Abraham must have three days to chew this bitter pill, which was indeed hard enough merely to swallow, and all the more unpalatable when a man is made to learn in detail the wormwood and the gall—he must journey on with that dear son before his eyes all day, listening to that voice so soon to be silent, and gazing into those bright eyes so soon to swim with tears, and to be dimmed in death. Abraham would have to remember in him his mother's joy, and his own delight, and all the while meditating upon that fatal stroke which, as far as he knew, God required of him. Oh, this laying siege to us by long and careful barricade is that which tries us! A sharp assault we might far better bear! To be burnt to death quickly upon the blazing firewood is comparatively an easy martyrdom, but to hang in chains roasting at a slow fire—to have the heart, hour by hour, pressed as in a vice, this it is that which tries faith! And this it was that Abraham endured through three long days! Only faith, mighty faith, could have assisted him to look in the face the grim trial which now assailed him. The patriarch was, no doubt, moved, and tried, and exercised not merely by the words which God pronounced in his hearing, but by natural and painful suggestions which, however readily they may have been disposed of, were, it would appear to us, certain to arise. He might have said, "I am called upon to perform an act which violates every instinct of my nature. I am to offer up my child! Horrible! Murderous! I am to burn my slaughtered child as a religious act—terrible, barbarous, and detestable! I am myself to offer him upon the altar *deliberately*. How can I do it? How

can God ask me to do that which tears up by the roots every one of the affections which He Himself has implanted—which runs counter to the whole of my noblest humanity? How can I do this?"

Brothers and sisters, coming home to ourselves, and trying to make a personal application of this, we may be called by the word of God to acts of obedience which may seem to us to do violence to all our natural affections. Christians are sometimes commanded to come out from the world by decided acts which provoke the hatred of those who are nearest and dearest. Now, if they love God, they will not love father nor mother, nor husband, nor brother, nor sister in comparison with Him, and though Christians will always be among the most tender-hearted of men, they will count their allegiance to God to be such that they must give up all for His sake, and deny every natural affection sooner than violate the divine law. Perhaps today you are suffering under an affliction which is grieving all the powers of your nature. Perhaps the Lord has been pleased to take away from you one dearer than life—for whom you could have been well content to die. Oh, learn with Abraham to kiss the rod! Let not Isaac stand before God! Let Isaac be dear, but let Isaac die sooner than God should be distrusted! Bow your head, and say, "Take what You will, my God; slay me, or take all I have, but I will still bless Your holy name." This was a main part of Abraham's trial—that it appeared to rudely crush all the tender outgrowths of the heart.

And it may have suggested itself to Abraham that he would in this way, by the slaughter of his son, be rendering all the promises of God futile. This was a very severe trial, for in proportion as a man believes the promise and values it will be his fear to do anything which might render it of no effect. Brothers and sisters, there are times with us when we are called to a course of action which looks as though it would jeopardize our highest hopes. A Christian is sometimes bound by duty to perform an action which, to all appearances, will destroy his future usefulness. I have often heard men urge, as a plea for remaining in a corrupt church, that they would lose the influence they had obtained in its midst, and by reason of their position, if they followed their conscience, and were true to God. But they are bound to lose *all* their supposed influence, and *renounce* their apparent vantage ground sooner than commit the least trespass upon their conscience; as much bound to do so as Abraham was bound to offer up Isaac, in whom all the promises of God were centered. It is neither your business nor mine to fulfill God's promise, nor to do the least wrong to produce the greatest good. To do evil that good may come is false morality, and wicked policy. For *us* is duty—for *God* is the fulfillment of His own promise, and the preservation of our usefulness. Though He dashes my reputation into shivers, and casts my usefulness to the four winds, yet if duty calls me, I must not hesitate a single second—for in that hesitation I shall be disobedient to my God! At the behest of God, Isaac must be offered though the heavens fall! And faith must answer all polite suggestions by the assurance that what God ordains can never, in its ultimate issue, produce anything but good! Obedience can never endanger blessings, for commands are never in real conflict with promises—God can raise up Isaac, and fulfill His own decree.

Further, Abraham may have felt—one would think *must* have felt—the thought that the death of Isaac was the destruction of all his comfort. The tent shall be darkened for Sarah, and the plain of Mamre barren as a wilderness for her lamenting heart. Alas for the wretched parent who has lost the hope of his old age, and the stay of his decrepitude! The sun grows black at noon, and the moon is eclipsed in darkness if Isaac dies; better that all calamities should have happened than this dear child be taken away! He must have felt thus, but it did not make him hesitate. Sometimes the course of duty may lie right over the dead body of our dearest comfort, and our brightest hope; it may be our duty to do that which will involve a succession of sorrows all but endless. But you must do right come what may. If the Lord bids you, you must seek faith to do it, though from that moment never should another joy make glad your heart until you are fully compensated for the loss of all by entering into the joy of your Lord at the last.

It must also, I should think, have occurred to Abraham, though he did not let it weigh with him, that from that time forth he would make himself many enemies; many would distrust his character; many would count him a perfect wretch; he would find wherever he went, that he was shunned as a murderer of his own child. How should he bear to meet Sarah again? "Where is my son? Surely you are a bloody husband to me," she would say, with far greater truth than Zipporah to Moses. How could he meet his servants again? How could he bear their looks which would say to him, "You have slain your son! You have embraced your hands in the blood of your own offspring!" How could he face Abimelech and the Philistines? How would the wandering tribes which roamed about his tent all hear of this strange massacre, and shudder at the thought of the monster who defiled the earth on which he trod! And yet observe the holy carelessness of this godlike man as to what might be thought or said of him. What did it matter

to him? Let them count him a devil—let a universal hiss consign him to the lowest hell of hatred, and contempt, he reckons not of it. God's will must be done! God will take care of His servant's character, or if He does not, His servant must suffer the consequences for his Lord's sake. Abraham must obey! No second course is open to him; he will not think of disobedience; he knows that God is right, and he must do God's will, come what may.

This, mark you, is one of the most grand points about the faith of the Father of the Faithful; and if you and I shall be called to exhibit it, may we never be found lacking, but brave slander and reproach with cheerfulness, through the power of the Holy Spirit. How Luther's lips must at first have trembled when he ventured to say that the Pope was Antichrist! Why, man, how can you dare to say such a thing? *Millions* bow down before him! He is the vicar of God on earth! Do they not worship our Lord God the Pope? "Yet he is Antichrist, and a very devil," said Luther, and at first he must have felt his ears burn, and his cheeks grow red at such a piece of apparent wickedness; and when he found himself shunned by the ecclesiastics who once had courted Doctor Martin Luther's company, think of what emptiness he must have felt! And when he heard the common howl that went up—even from the refuse of mankind—that the monk was a drunkard, and, inasmuch as he chose to marry a nun, was filled with lust, and sold to Satan, and I know not what beside, it must have been a grand thing when Luther could feel, "They may call me what they will, but I know that God has spoken unto my soul the great truth that man is to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ, and not by ceremonies which the Pope ordains, nor the indulgences which he grants; and if my name is consigned to the limbo of the infernal, yet will I speak out the truth of God which I know, and in God's name I will not hold my tongue." We must be brought to this—to be willing to put aside the verdict of our times, and of all times past or future, and to stand alone, if need be, in the midst of a howling and infuriated world, to do honor to the command of God, which is the only necessity to us, which it is imperative for us to obey, even though it should bring shame or death itself.

Here, then, was Abraham's faith made perfect, that, inasmuch as the outward circumstances were severe, and the suggestions arising out of the circumstances were peculiarly perplexing, he put aside both, and dared the ills of all, in order that he might, without delay or objection, fulfill his Master's will to the full extent—firmly believing that no hurt would come of it, but rather he himself should be more blessed and God more glorified.

## II. We shall now notice THE PATRIARCH UNDER THE TRIAL.

In Abraham's bearing during this test everything is delightful. In trying to mention each detail, I fear that I may mar the effect of the whole. His obedience is a picture of all the virtues in one, blended in marvelous harmony. It is not so much in one point that the great patriarch excels as in the whole of his sacred deed.

First notice the submission of Abraham under this temptation. His *submission*, I say, because you will observe that there is no record kept of any answer which Abraham gave to God, verbally, or in any other form. I suppose, therefore, that there was none. Strange and startling command, "Take your only son, and offer him for a burnt sacrifice!" But Abraham does not argue the point. It is natural to expect that he should have said, "But, Lord, do You really mean it? Can a *human* sacrifice ever be acceptable to You? I know it cannot; You are love and kindness; can You take delight, therefore, in the blood of my dear son? It cannot be." But there is not a word of argument, not one solitary question that even looks like hesitation. "God is God," he seems to say, "and it is not for me to ask Him why, or seek a reason for His bidding. He has said it; I will do it." There does not appear to have been a word of entreaty or prayer. Prayer against so dread a trial might not have been sinful. If the man had been less a man, it might have been not only natural, but right for him to say, "O my God, spare my child! Put me on some other trial, but not on this, so strange, so mysterious. My Lord, for Sarah's sake, and for Your promise's sake, test me not so." I say that such a prayer as that might not have been sinful from an ordinary man; it might have been, perhaps, even virtuous and commendable, but from this grand soul there is no such prayer. He does not ask to escape. He does not pray to be delivered when he once knows God's will. Much less is there the semblance of murmuring; the man goes about the whole business as if he had been only ordered to sacrifice a lamb ordinarily taken from the flock. There is a coolness of deliberation about it which does not prove that he was a stoic, but which does prove that he was gigantic in his faith! "Not staggering," says the apostle—and that is just the word. You and I, if we had done right, would have done it in a staggering, hesitating manner, but Abraham—not a nerve quivers, not a muscle is paralyzed. He knows that God commands him, and with awful sternness, and yet with childlike simplicity, he sets about the sacrifice.

The lesson I gather from this (and we may as well collect these lessons as we go, as gleaners who gather the ears as they walk down the furrows)—the lesson is this: when you know a duty, never pray to be excused, but go and do it in God's name in the power of faith. If ever you clearly see your Master's will, do not begin to argue it, or wait for better opportunities, and so on—do it at once! I know not how much of joy and honor some of you may have missed by the evil habit of beating around the bush with your consciences. It is a very terrible thing to begin to let conscience grow hard, for it soon sears as with a hot iron. It is like the freezing of a pond; the first film of ice is scarcely perceptible: keep the waters stirring, and you will prevent the ice from hardening it; but once let it film over and remain so, it thickens over the surface, and it thickens still, and at last it is so solid that a wagon might be drawn over the solid water. So with conscience, it films over gradually, and at last it becomes hard, unfeeling, and it can bear up with a weight of iniquity. Ah, it is not for us to delay obedience under the pretense of *prayer*, but to yield prompt service. I have been sometimes surprised and staggered with Christian people who have said in the matter of baptism, for instance, "I am persuaded that it is my duty as a believer to be baptized, but it has never been laid home to my conscience." Never laid home to your conscience?! You know that God commands, and yet you dare confess your conscience has become so base that you do not feel it your duty to obey?! "Oh, but I have not felt that it is impressed on me." *Felt!* And is feeling to be the measure of your allegiance to God, the clipper and the cutter of God's law? If you know it to be the right, I charge you, obey! O sirs, this world has come to a sad pass because of the tricks men play with their consciences! This is the cause of all those unnatural senses that people give to texts and creeds! This is the secret reason why the religion of this land which claims to be Protestant, is becoming Popish to its very core—because evangelical men have sworn to a Popish catechism, and given it another sense; and instead of coming out of a corrupt church, have dallied with their consciences, and so by their practice have nullified their preaching, and taught men to lie! Small wonder is it that traders rob and cheat when men professing godliness use words in senses which they can never bear to unsophisticated minds! If professing men were but jealous for the glory of God, and exact and precise in all their walking before the Most High, they would have more of the honor, more of the blessedness of Abraham, and their influence upon the world would be more like salt, and less like the evil leaven which corrupts the mass.

But we must pass on to notice next Abraham's *prudence*. Prudence, some of us heard this last week, may be a great virtue, but often becomes one of the meanest and most beggarly of vices. Prudence rightly considered is a notable handmaid to faith, and the prudence of Abraham was seen in this, that he did not consult Sarah as to what he was about to do. Naturally, prudence, as we call it, would have said, "This is a strange command; you had better consult with the wise about it; you believe it comes from God, but you may be mistaken in your impression. At least it is *due* to Sarah, having such an interest in her own child, to take her judgment in the matter; moreover, there is that good man Eliezer—he has often helped and guided you in a dilemma, you had better have a talk with him." "Yes," but Abraham probably thought, "these beloved ones may weaken me; they cannot strengthen my resolution or alter my duty"; and, therefore, like Paul, he did not consult with flesh and blood. After all, my brothers and sisters, what is the good of consulting when we know the Lord's mind? If I go to the Bible, and see very plainly there that such-and-such a thing is my *duty*—for me to consult with man as to whether I shall obey God or not is treason against the Majesty of heaven! It is vile for us to consult with men when we have the plain command of God! Fancy an inferior officer in an army, when ordered in the hour of battle to lead an attack, turning round to a fellow soldier to ask his opinion of the orders he has received from the commander-in-chief! Let the man be tried by court-martial, or shot down upon the field—he is utterly unloyal; it needs no overt act; the thought is mutiny, the words of inquiry a flat rebellion. When God commands, we have nothing left but to obey; consultations with flesh and blood are sins of scarlet dye.

Notice, further, Abraham's *willingness*. He rose early in the morning. Oh, but the most of us would have taken a long sleep! Or if we could not have slept, we would have lain till dinner time at least, tossing restlessly. "What? Slay my son—my only son Isaac? The command does not specify the hour—there is no peremptory word as to the time of starting upon the awful journey. At least let us postpone it as long as we may, for the dear young man's sake! Let him live as long as possible." But no, delay was not in the patriarch's mind. Is it not grand? The holy man rises early! He will let his God see that He can trust him, and that he will do His bidding without hesitation. O believers, always be prompt in doing what God commands you! Hesitate not! The very pith of your obedience will lie in your making haste, and delaying not to keep the Lord's commandment. He showed his willingness, again, by the fact that he

prepared the wood himself. It is expressly said that he “split the wood.” He was a sheik and a mighty man in his camp, but he became a wood-splitter, thinking no work menial if done for God, and reckoning the work too sacred for other hands. With splitting heart he splits the wood; wood for the burning of his heir; wood for the sacrifice of his own dear child! Herein you see the willingness of Abraham, and may it be ours to obey God with such a ready zeal, that in every little circumstance of our obedience it shall be seen that we are not unwilling slaves chained to the oar of duty, and flogged to service by the threats of the law, but loving children of a Father whom we count it our highest joy to serve, even though that service should involve the sacrifice of our dearest Isaacs.

Further, I must ask you to notice Abraham's *forethought*. He did not desire to break down in his deeds. Having split the wood, he took with him the fire and everything else necessary to consummate the work. Some people take no forethought about serving God, and then if a little hitch occurs, they cry out that it is a providential circumstance, and make an excuse of it for escaping the unpleasant task. Oh, how easy it is when you do not want to involve yourselves in trouble, to think that you see some reason for not doing so! “You know,” says one, “we must live.” “Ah,” says another, “why should I throw myself out of employment merely because of a small point of conscience? And, indeed, there has just now happened a circumstance which almost compels me to act *against* my belief, at least for a time; indeed, providence dearly bids me remain as I am. I know the Bible says I ought to act differently, but still, you know, we must take circumstances into consideration, and if they do not quite alter the commandments, they may, you know, be an excuse for postponing obedience.” Abraham, the wise, thoughtful servant of God, takes care, as far as possible, to forestall all difficulties that might prevent his doing right. “No,” he says, “there is no compromise for me; my duty is clear. Does God command it? I will provide all that is necessary for the fulfillment of His will. I need no excuse for drawing back, for draw back I will not, come what may.”

Observe, further, Abraham's *perseverance*. He continues three days in his journey, journeying towards the place where he was as much to sacrifice himself as to sacrifice his child. He bids his servants remain where they were, fearful, perhaps, lest they might be moved by pity to prevent the sacrifice. Now, you and I would have liked to provide ourselves with some friend who might have stepped in to prevent, and have taken the responsibility off our shoulders. But, no, the good man puts everything aside that may prevent him going to the end; then he puts the wood on Isaac; oh, what a load he placed on his own heart as he lay that burden on his dear son! He carried the fire himself in the censer at his side, but what a fire consumed his heart! How sharp was the trial when the son said, “My Father, behold the fire, and the wood, but where is the lamb?” Was there no tear for the patriarch to brush away? He made but a short reply. We have every reason to believe that other replies followed which are not recorded, in which he explained to his son how the case stood, and what it was that God had commanded. It is hard to suppose that Isaac would have blindly yielded, unless first an explanation had been given that such a command had come from the highest authority, and must be obeyed. Oh, the unhappiness of the father's mind! But let me rather say the *majesty* of the father's *faith* that he puts down all his feelings, and though nature speaks, yet faith speaks louder, still. And if the deep of his affliction calls out loud, yet the deeper faith in his God calls louder still. Now see him! See the holy man as he gathers up the loose stones which lie upon Mount Moriah! See him take them, and with the assistance of his son, place them one upon another till the altar has been built. Do you see him next lay the wood upon the altar in order? No signs of flurry or trepidation; see him bind his son with cords! Oh, what cords were those binding his poor, poor heart! He lays his son upon the altar as though he were a victim! *Now* he unsheathes the knife, and the deed is about to be done, but God is content; Abraham has truly sacrificed his son in his heart, and the command is fulfilled. Notice the obedience of this friend of God—it was no *playing* at giving up his son: it was really *doing* it. It was no talking about what he could do, and would do, perhaps, but his faith was practical and heroic. I call upon all believers to note this. We must not only love God so as to hope that we should be ready to give up *all* for Him, but we must be literally and actually ready to do it. We must ask for more faith, that when the trial comes, we shall not be proved to have been mere windbag pretenders, mere wordy talkers, but true to God in very deed. “Ah,” said one the other night, “I thought I had great faith, but now that I am racked with pain, I find I have scarcely any.” “Oh,” might some of us say, “my God, I thought I had faith in You; but now it comes to the endurance of this affliction which You put upon me, I am ready to kick against You, and cannot say, ‘Your will be done.’” Ah, how many professors love God until it comes to losing their pence and their pounds. They will obey God until it involves penury and poverty; they will be faithful to God till it comes to scoffing



and shame, and then straightway they are offended, and thereby prove who is their god—for they turn away from the unseen, and look for what they call the main chance, for the interest of time, and their own gain, and their own pleasures. God is no God of theirs except to talk about. Let Christ's commands be pleasing, and men will accept them; let them grind a little too severely, and men turn aside, for, after all, most professors serve their God up to a certain point, but no further, and so show that they love not God at all.

I have but very feebly brought out into the light the obedience of Abraham. I must not, however, leave the picture till I have mentioned what was at the bottom of it all. Paul tells us in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews, that “*by faith* Abraham offered up Isaac.” Now what was the faith that enabled Abraham to do this? Although many expositors think not, I adhere to the opinion that Abraham felt in his own mind that God could not lie, and God's word could not fail, and therefore hoped to see Isaac raised from the dead. “Now,” he said to himself, “I have had an express promise that in Isaac shall be my seed; and if I am called to put him to death, that promise must still be kept, and perhaps God will raise him from the dead; even if his body is consumed to ashes, the Lord can yet restore my son to life.” We are told in the New Testament that he believed in God, that He could raise Isaac from the dead, from which he also received him in a figure. Some have said, “But this lessens the trial.” Granted, if you will, but it does not lessen the faith, and it is the *faith* which is most to be admired. He was sustained under the trial by the conviction that it was possible for God to raise his son from the dead, and so to fulfill His promise. But under that, and lower down, there was in Abraham's heart the conviction that by some means, if not by *that* means, God would justify him in doing what he was to do; that it could never be wrong to do what God commanded him; that God could not command him to do a wrong thing, and therefore doing it he could not possibly suffer the loss of the promise made in regard to Isaac. In some way or other, God would take care of him if he did but faithfully keep to God's command. And I think the more indistinct Abraham's idea may have been of the way in which God could carry out the promise, the more glorious was the faith which still held to it that *nothing* could frustrate the promise, and that he would do his duty, come what might. Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord believe that all things work together for your good, and if you are commanded by conscience, and God's word to do that which would bankrupt you, or cast you into disrepute, it cannot be a real hurt to you! It must be all right! I have seen men cast out of work owing to their keeping the Lord's-Day, or they have been, for a little time, out of a job because they could not fall into the tricks of trade, and they have suffered awhile. But, alas, some of them have lost heart after a time, and yielded to the evil! O for the faith which never will, under any persuasion or compulsion, fly from the field! If men had strength enough to say, “If I die and rot I will not sin; if they cast me out to the carrion crow, yet still nothing shall make me violate my conscience, or do what God commands me not to do, or fail to do what God commands me to perform!” This is the faith of Abraham! Would to God we had it! We should have a glorious race of Christians if such were the case!

**III.** I have left myself only a few minutes for the last point, which is, let us OBSERVE THE BLESSING WHICH CAME TO ABRAHAM THROUGH THE TRIAL OF HIS FAITH. The blessing was sevenfold.

First, *the trial was withdrawn*—Isaac was unharmed. The nearest way to be at the end of tribulation is to be resigned to it. God will not try you when you can fully bear any trial. Give up all and you shall keep all; give up your Isaac, and Isaac shall not need to be given up! But if you will save your life, you shall lose it.

Secondly, Abraham had the *expressed approval of God*—“Now I know that you fear God.” The man whose conscience bears witness with the Holy Spirit enjoys great peace, and that peace comes to him because under that trial he has proved himself a true and faithful servant. O brothers and sisters, if we cannot stand the trials of this life, what shall we do in the Day of Judgment? If in the common scales held in the hand of Providence we are found wanting, what shall we do before that Great White Throne where every thought shall be brought into judgment before the Most High? How will you run with the horsemen at the last if you cannot run with the footmen now? If we are afraid of a little loss, and a little scorn, what would we have done in days of the martyrs—when men counted not their lives dear to them that they might win Christ?

Abraham next had a *clearer view of Christ than ever he had before*—no small reward. “Abraham saw My day,” said Christ—“He saw it and was glad.” In himself, ready to sacrifice his son, he had a representation of Jehovah who spared not His own Son. In the ram slaughtered instead of Isaac, he had a representation of the great Substitute who died that men might live.

More than that, to Abraham *God's name was more fully revealed that day*. He called Him Jehovah-Jireh, a step in advance of anything that he had known before. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." The more you can stand the test of trials; the better instructed shall you be in the things of God. There is light beyond if you have grace to press through the difficulty.

To Abraham that day *the covenant was confirmed by oath*. The Lord swore by Himself! Brothers and sisters, you shall never get the grace of God so confirmed to you as when you have proved your fidelity to God by obeying Him at all costs. You shall then find how true are the promises, how faithful is God to the covenant of grace. The quickest road to full assurance is perfect obedience! While assurance will help you to obey, obedience will help you to be assured—"If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

Then it was that Abraham had also *a fuller promise with regard to the seed*. Out of 10 promises which Abraham received, the first are mainly about the land, but the last are concerning his seed. We get to love Christ more, to value Him more, to see Him, and to understand Him better, the more we are consecrated to the Lord's will.

And last of all, God pronounced over Abraham's head *a blessing*, the like of which had never been given to man before; and what if I say that to no single individual in the whole lapse of time has there ever been given, distinctly and personally, such a blessing as was given to Abraham that day?! First in trial, he is also first in blessing; first in faithfulness to his God, he becomes first in the sweet rewards which faithfulness is sure to obtain! brothers and sisters, let us ask God to make us like Abraham, His true children, that we may gain such rewards as he obtained; may He help us to make a surrender this morning in our hearts of all that we have of the dearest objects of our affections. May we by faith always take all to the altar in our willingness to give all up, if so the Lord wills. This day may we feel the spirit of perfect faith, believing that God's promises must be kept though circumstances of outward providence, and even our own inward feelings should seem to belie the sure word of God. Let us labor to know the reality of life by faith! May we believe God in the same literal way in which we believe our friends—but only after a higher and surer sort; let us from this day so believe in God that we shall never ask a question about consequences whenever we have a conviction of duty. May we never pause to ask whether this shall make us rich or poor, honorable, or despised, whether this will bring us peace or bring us anguish, but onward, right onward, as though God had shot us from the eternal bow, let us go right on in the full conviction that if there is temporary darkness, it must end in everlasting light. If there is present loss, it must end in eternal gain. Let us set to our seal that God is true, that the rewards are to the righteous, and true peace to the obedient, and let us believe that in the end it must be our highest gain to serve God though that service should, for the present, bring with it dire loss. O that there may be trained in this house a race of much enduring believers, who can endure hardness, but cannot endure sin!

May you, my brothers and sisters, obey your convictions as constantly as matter obeys the laws of gravitation, and may you never sell your birthright for the world's wretched pottage. Could this house be filled with such men and women, London would shake beneath the tramp of our army! This whole land would perceive that a new power had arisen up in the land! Truth and righteousness would exalt their horn on high, and then would deceitful trading, and greed for gold and Jesuitical faltering with words—this flirting with the Popish harlot, would be put to an end once and for all. O that the flag of truth and righteousness might be unfurled by a valiant band, for that banner shall wave in the day of the last triumph when the banners of earth shall be rolled in blood! May our God thus bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him. The Lord make us true men like Abraham, true because believing, and may He help us to sacrifice our all, if need be, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—GENESIS 22.**

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